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GRAM SAHAYAK

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OFFICE OF THE ... EXTENSION TRAINING CENTRE
G.354
JUN 1959
T. KALLUPATTI
21, 2, 13, 8, 16
CD 87 (e)

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G.217

THE PUBLICATIONS DIVISION

GOI

December 1958 (Agrahayana 1880)

PUBLISHED BY THE DIRECTOR, PUBLICATIONS DIVISION, DELHI-8 AND PRINTED BY THE PRODUCTION OFFICER, GOVT. OF INDIA UNITED PRESS, OLD SECRETARIAT, DELHI-8.

1858

GRAM SAHAYAK

CD77/1
CD:82/1
1944
630.7152 GOI

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THE PUBLICATIONS DIVISION
Ministry of Information & Broadcasting
Government of India

CONTENTS

		Page
I.	Role of Village Leaders	3
II.	The Scheme	4
III.	Selection and Training	6
IV.	Follow-up Programme	11
V.	Conclusion	15

I. ROLE OF VILLAGE LEADERS

Of all the development programmes which find a place in our National Plan, the one which most vitally concerns the people is community development. This is because it covers more than 85 per cent of our people, who live in the rural areas.

Clearly, the task of improving village life, of overcoming the ill effects of centuries of poverty and ignorance, is a very big one. Our villagers need food, clothing, shelter and protection from disease. They must have facilities for education, recreation and a proper community life. To meet these needs, the State can provide some money, equipment and workers to teach the people new things, but most of the work must be done by the people themselves. Indeed, the whole idea behind the community development programme is that the people, with government aid and guidance, work together shoulder to shoulder for their common welfare.

Thus the function of block workers like the *gram sevak* is to create in the village people a desire for improvement and a willingness to work for its achievement. However, the *gram sevak*, being an outsider, cannot provide the leadership which is necessary to bring about this changed outlook. His function is to guide, not lead. Having shown the way, he remains in the background. The actual leaders have to come from among the people themselves.

There is no shortage of such leaders. In every village groups form round some common interest, usually a common occupation. Each group has its own leaders who may not be known as such but who are respected and who influence the thought and actions of other members of the

group. These persons are not to be confused with political leaders. The Hindi term *gram sahayak* perhaps describes them best.

These "natural leaders" of the people can be of immense value to the community development programme if given proper guidance and training. They can provide the active local leadership which is vital to the success of the movement. To fit them for this role, short-duration functional camps are now being arranged in blocks throughout the country. In these camps the trainees are taught, by means of talks and demonstrations, improved practices to be applied in their field of work.

It is expected that, on their return to their villages, the *sahayaks* will practise the new techniques they have learned and will in turn pass on this knowledge to their "followers" and, through them, to the community as a whole. Thus each *sahayak* will become in his own sphere a kind of honorary local village worker and the whole development programme will proceed more smoothly, firmly based on the people's active participation under their own leaders.

II. THE SCHEME

The proposal to train progressive village leaders for the rural improvement programme was originally made at the Development Commissioners' Conference at Mussoorie in April 1957. The Ministry of Community Development accepted the recommendation, and after holding experimental camps in the Punjab and Rajasthan in June and July of that year it drew up a scheme of special short-duration camps for training in the following groups of subjects :

(a) agriculture, animal husbandry and minor irrigation;
(b) panchayats, co-operation and village communications;
(c) village industries and housing;

(d) education, social education, public health and sanitation; and

(e) women's programmes.

In August and September, '57, officials of the Ministry of Community Development discussed the scheme in detail with State Government representatives at two orientation camps held in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar States, respectively. The Directors of In-service Training and Youth Programmes of the States and an instructor from each of the extension training centres were also present. The States in their turn organized camps to train the trainers. With the way thus cleared, it was possible to make a start with the camps themselves in October 1957.

Under the scheme, attendance at a camp is limited to about 50 *sahayaks*, chosen from all the villages comprising a *gram sevak's* Circle, the villages being represented more or less according to population. The camp generally lasts three days.

These camps are quite different from the integrated type of camps which have been organized in past years. In the *sahayak* camps the training is strictly functional, i.e., it covers only a particular group of subjects, with special reference to local conditions and local problems. Anything not connected with this group is avoided. Thus, in training camps for the agricultural subjects, *melas*, *bhajans*, public meetings, etc., find no place. Nor should these functional camps be confused with seminars. Here are no separate group discussions followed by a plenary session, as in a seminar, because the aim is strictly this, to pass on scientific recommendations to the trainees.

For a start, in view of the food shortage and because agriculture is the basis of village life, it was decided to hold camps only in the first group of subjects from October 1957 to September 1958. However, the annual Conference on Community Development in May 1958 decided that "agriculture" camps should continue for a full year more before new subjects were taken up. The intention is that the good work that is being done in these camps should be consolidat-

ed and fresh groups of *gram sahayaks* trained in these camps.

III. SELECTION AND TRAINING

The initial selection of *sahayaks* for training is made from among those who have a special interest in the group of subjects for which the camp is to be held, besides having a reputation for leadership, honesty and hard work. Preference is given to persons of mature views, though very elderly people are avoided as they are usually absorbed in family and other personal matters. Care is also taken to see that all sections of the community, including the backward classes, are represented.

The final selection of trainees from a particular village is made by the *panchayat* in consultation with the block staff. This is very necessary because it has been recognized that the *panchayat* is the institution best fitted to carry out the development programme at the village level. To further ensure co-operation between the *sahayaks* and the *panchayat*, at least one member of the *panchayat* may be selected for training for each group of subjects. In villages where there are no *panchayats*, the selection is made in consultation with group organizations like co-operative societies or village development councils, where these exist.

Organization

Since a camp generally lasts only three days, great care has to be taken over details of organization to utilize the time to the full. The site of the camp has to be chosen with care. For instance, for training in agricultural subjects a village where good work has already been done may be selected. An equally important factor is, however, the willingness of the people of the village to co-operate fully. Once the site is decided the detailed plans are drawn up by the

B.D.O., the S.E.O. and the *gram sevak* in consultation with the village *panchayat*, the elders and other responsible people such as school-teachers.

A large *dharmsala*, school or *panchayat-ghar* is normally used for housing the trainees. The trainees live together for the full duration of the camp. In this way, a sense of comradeship with people of neighbouring villages is fostered. They are lodged in three or four groups, each group electing a leader who is responsible for general cleanliness and discipline. People from the same village are not allowed to stay in a single group since the intention is that they should be able to make new friends. Drinking water, lighting, bathing arrangements, latrines and other essential amenities are provided.

As far as possible, the living conditions demonstrate to the trainees improved practices which they can carry back to their villages. For instance, in a well organized camp smokeless *choolas* would be used for cooking food, the latrines would be of the trench and slab type, used water would be drawn into soak pits, and so on. Also, the drinking water well would be disinfected and the premises sprayed with D.D.T. The cost of the arrangements, including meals, is generally borne by the host village, though the campers themselves sometimes meet part of the expenses. Wherever necessary, and especially in tribal areas, a subsidy from the block funds may also be given. In many cases the host village forms a Mess Committee to arrange for stores, fuel, utensils, cooks, water supply, etc. Arrangements for first aid are also made.

The trainees arrive on the evening previous to the opening of the camp, when an inauguration function may be held. These are strictly business-like camps and so formalities have to be kept down to the minimum if not altogether avoided. A new President is elected every day from among the trainees. His main duties are to read out the agenda of the day, maintain order, introduce the speaker and, if possible, sum up the discussions. The block workers assist him but remain in the background.

Generally, the earlier part of the day is used for talks and discussions and demonstrations are held in the evening. On the closing day the Extension Officer gives a final summing-up talk, explains the follow-up programme and reminds the trainees of what is expected of them on their return to their villages.

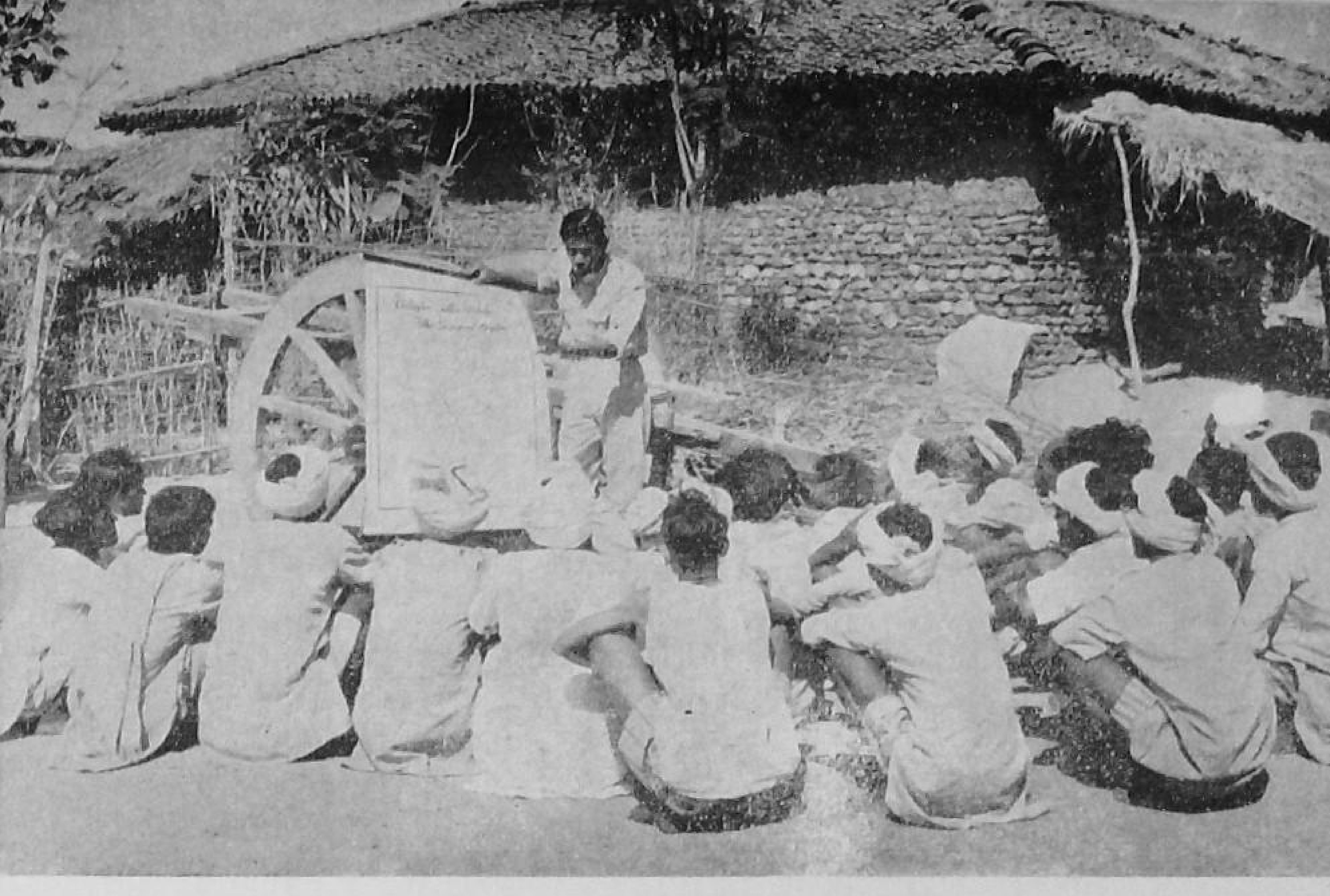
Training

The Block Development Officer is in overall charge of the camp, but the main responsibility of conducting the training course falls on the block's subject-matter specialists, who have received special instruction for this purpose at the extension training centres or elsewhere. The S.E.O. helps the specialists by arranging for films and other audio-visual aids as well as in regard to exhibitions. The *gram sevak* is responsible for camp arrangements and assists the *sahayaks*. The district officers dealing with the subjects concerned give guidance to their extension officers. Stress has been laid on the need for all those connected with the running of the camps to have a thorough knowledge of the scheme in all its aspects. For this purpose the Collectors and B.D.Os. have been asked to organize study circles.

Though Panchayats, Co-operatives and Village Communications form a separate group of subjects, in actual practice the Extension Officers for Panchayats and Co-operatives are expected to take part in all the groups of *gram sahayak* camps. This is necessary in view of the role of these institutions as the agencies for carrying out the development programme at the village level.

As mentioned earlier, the training takes two forms—talks and demonstrations. In the short space of three days it is not possible to turn the trainees into experts. Nor is this the intention. Rather, it is hoped to enlarge their outlook so that they can turn to new and scientific methods for solutions to their problems.

Because of this time factor, it is essential for the instructors to prepare their talks very thoroughly in advance. In this they receive assistance from the district, regional and



A gram sevak talking to village leaders

Lunch time at a gram sahayaks' camp

Discuss

...ons help to clarify village leaders' ideas. Picture shows a number of trainees listening to an extension worker

An extension worker showing improved seeds to village leaders

State officials. The class-room approach is avoided. The instructor does not deliver a lecture but talks to the trainees, who are grouped in a semi-circle facing him. Visual aids such as photographs, posters and models are displayed in such a manner that every trainee can see them clearly. Having taken up a point, the instructor explains it with the help of the photographs, models, etc. These are then passed from hand to hand, and finally a discussion is started in order to clear up all doubts.

Audio-visual aids indeed play an important part in the training. At every camp, film shows and exhibitions are arranged. Only films of an educational nautre relating to the subjects under study are shown, for these are subject-matter camps. The subject-matter of the films is usually discussed at the next sitting to ensure that the lessons have been well understood. Similarly, the exhibitions are technical. In the case of the "agricultural" group of subjects they cover such aspects as improved seeds and implements, green manures and fertilizers, fruit and vegetables and pesticides and insecticides. In these exhibitions, the stress is always on local conditions and local products. In addition, there is generally an exhibition portraying development activities in the Block.

In talks and discussions, stress is constantly laid on the central fact that the community development programme is a movement in which the village people by their own efforts and working under their own leaders strive to improve their living conditions. In addition, two sittings—one at the beginning and the other at the end of the session—are usually allotted for discussion of the aims and philosophy of the programme.

The talks themselves cover all aspects of the group of subjects for which the camp is being held. For instance, in the agricultural subjects, attention is focussed on measures for building up soil fertility, introduction of improved methods of cultivation, plant protection, prevention of cattle diseases, etc. Particular stress is laid on green manuring, rural composting and the growth of improved varieties of

fodder. Packets containing vegetable and green manure seeds are on sale at most camps. Their duty to apply and pass on the newly gained knowledge, as well as to supervise the productive use of credit and to organize marketing is made clear to the *sahayaks*.

While such talks and discussions are useful, there can be no doubt that the more effective method of training is by practical demonstrations. It is common knowledge that a person can learn much more by doing something, or watching it done, than by merely being told about it.

Care has to be taken to plan the demonstrations well in advance and to arrange for all the necessary materials and equipment. For instructing the trainees, the services of *gram sevaks* in the neighbouring Circles or demonstrators of the Government Department concerned are utilized. If an adequate number of instructors is available the trainees can be divided into groups and each thus receives greater individual attention.

Generally, five or six demonstrations are held on each day. The instructor gives a short talk before each demonstration, even though the subject may have been discussed earlier in the hall. After the demonstration the trainees are made to practise it before the instructor and then a discussion is held to clear up doubts.

Shramdan is an important part of the training of *gram sahayaks*. It helps them to realize how much good can be accomplished by people working together and how this helps create a spirit of unity and brotherhood. In *shramdan* the host villagers join the trainees. The items of work are chosen by the *gram sevak* in consultation with the *panchayatdars* and village elders and all possible steps—advance publicity, supply of tools, grouping of workers, etc.—are taken to see that the task is carried out smoothly.

The officials who take part in the camp stay in the host village and, as far as possible, eat with the trainees and mix freely with them. This contact is of great benefit to both. In particular, the villagers' difficulties in obtaining government help in matters like loans, supply of seeds and fertili-

zers, etc., can be better understood. Also, after their practical training the *sahayaks* may want to know how they can get improved implements and whether loans or subsidies would be available for buying them. These and other questions can be promptly and correctly answered.

District officials, specialists and progressive farmers are often invited to the camps to deliver talks. This has the double benefit of lessening the strain on the instructors and making the training itself more varied and interesting.

IV. FOLLOW-UP PROGRAMME

As the training of *gram sahayaks* lasts only three days it would be unfair to expect them, on their return from the camp, to be able to function in the desired manner without further help. Therefore, great importance is attached to follow-up activities in which the block staff co-operate fully with the *sahayaks*.

Till now, camps have been held only for training in the agricultural group of subjects. For the follow-up programme of trained farm leaders, the following five general aims have been laid down :

(1) There must be frequent contact between the farm leaders and the extension staff of the Block.

(2) Each leader should undertake one project through which he could put to use the knowledge he has gained at the camp; and there should be group projects for all the trainees from each village.

(3) Farmers' clubs or *mandals* and similar bodies should be set up. *Panchayatdars* and Directors of Co-operation should be associated with such bodies. Through such clubs improved practices can be more easily spread.

(4) The farm leaders should meet periodically to learn new things and discuss problems; and

(5) There should be recognition of their role as leaders so that they may be encouraged to work hard.

For carrying out these respective aims, the following measures have been proposed, and are being put into effect as far as possible:

(1) The *gram sevak* should keep in close touch with the farm leaders, both individually and in groups. The Extension Officer for Agriculture should meet them at least once in two months and the B.D.O. and other inspecting officers should also use them to get development work done by the villagers. The *sahayaks* should be encouraged to visit the block headquarters.

(2) The choice of projects to be undertaken is conveniently made on the last day of the camp itself. The following procedure has been suggested:

(a) A number of suitable projects, both for individuals and groups, should be written on a blackboard. The campers should be divided into groups, village-wise, and allowed to select individual and group projects to be carried out on their return home. Each *sahayak* should then enter the particulars in his register. If he is illiterate, this should be done for him.

(b) A complete list of the projects to be undertaken should be circulated to the B.D.O., the extension staff and the *gram sevak*, who should note the details in their registers.

(c) The extension staff should contact the *sahayaks* during their visits to the villages, talk with them and help them to carry out the projects undertaken. Suggestions made should be entered in the registers both of the *sahayaks* and the extension workers.

(d) The B.D.O. should maintain a comprehensive register of *sahayaks*, village and circle-wise, with columns for remarks by the Extension Officers and *gram sevaks*. These remarks should be entered at

the time of the monthly block staff meetings and should pertain to the activities of all *sahayaks* contacted during the course of the month.

The keeping of note-books are registers is important firstly because a continuous record of the work done is thus available and, secondly because it enables each extension worker to get to know all the *sahayaks* in his area and to go prepared to help them during his tours.

(3) After training, the *sahayaks* should be helped to form farmers' clubs or *mandals* in their villages if these are not already in existence. These clubs are a very useful means of spreading information about the use of improved seeds, fertilizers, implements and new practices. Training classes can be organized and teams of farmers formed to work together on schemes of mutual benefit. It would be of great help to these bodies if they are recognized as the main medium of spreading information on farming matters in the villages. The Extension Officers for Agriculture and Animal Husbandry and the B.D.O. should always seek their help in carrying out improvements. It would be a further gain if the presiding members of the *panchayats* and co-operatives were to become patrons of the farmers' clubs.

(4) Farm leaders belonging to the same village should meet at least once a month to discuss their problems and future activities. They should also be encouraged to meet similar leaders in neighbouring villages for discussions and, if possible, to carry out some common projects. Besides this, all the active farm leaders in a *gram sevak's* Circle should meet once in six months in the presence of the Extension Officer to review progress. A short training course could be arranged along with this meeting.

Finally, there should be an annual meeting at the block level, each village being represented by a *sahayak* elected from among his fellows. Members

might be chosen at this meeting for visiting adjoining Blocks to study their special problems. The District Agricultural Officer should attend the meeting, as should the instructors of the extension training centre or basic agricultural college situated in the Block.

(5) To encourage farm leaders, they should be treated with respect and, as far as possible, extension work should be undertaken with their active co-operation. Thus they should be asked to help in the distribution of improved seeds and fertilizers, they should be present when new methods of farming are tried out and instructions and advice to the villagers should be passed on through them.

A few other general suggestions have also been made to improve the working of the follow-up programme. For instance, it has been suggested that the State Department of Agriculture should produce suitable literature dealing with improvements in agriculture. Such literature could be examined at meetings and sent to farmers' clubs and individual *sahayaks*. There should also be a monthly or bi-monthly newsletter dealing with the activities of farm leaders in the Block. In some cases this could be in the form of a printed letter covering four or five Blocks where agricultural conditions are similar. Other suggestions relate to the forwarding of problems requiring research to the State Agricultural Department and the need to encourage outstanding farm leaders to visit other Blocks to exchange views and experienses and, where possible, to broadcast in the rural programme of A.I.R.

In view of the large number of camps in every State, it is felt that there should be an official at the State level, such as a Director of Youth Activities, responsible for general supervision of the camps and the follow-up activities. Most States have now appointed such officials. It is also necessary to involve district officers more closely with the scheme in order to give it added technical strength.

The follow-up programme outlined above relates to

gram sahayaks trained in the agricultural group of subjects. The same principles will, however, apply to *sahayaks* in the other groups for whom training camps are to be organized.

V. CONCLUSION

The *gram sahayaks'* training programme has been in existence for only a year, but already it has taken firm root. The popularity of these camps can be judged from the fact that the organizers are finding it difficult to limit attendance to invitees.

The *sahayaks* are returning to their villages with their doubts resolved and with a determination to work hard in their own fields and for the common good. The extension staff, too, have gained a lot from their contact with the trainees. They are now in a better position to understand the villagers' practical problems and can concentrate on solving them. They have also established personal relations with progressive farmers who will help carry scientific knowledge to the village people.

The real test of success is in the follow-up programme. The State Governments have reported that the *sahayaks* are adopting modern methods of cultivation and that the other villagers are following their lead. There has been a big increase in the demand for improved ploughs and other implements, besides better seeds and fertilizers.

Here and there a few weak features have been detected in the running of the camps, but they are mainly minor matters which can be overcome by better organization and attention to details.

It was proposed to hold about 20,000 camps for agricultural trainees between October 1957 and September 1958. During the first nine months about 9,500 camps were opened in which more than 4,50,000 *sahayaks* were given training.

It is expected that about 70 per cent of the target will be achieved. The shortfall is mainly due to the difficulty of setting a new scheme in motion. The stress has been on quality rather than the number of camps. There can be no doubt that with the inauguration of this scheme a new chapter has begun in the history of rural development in India.

APPENDIX

Statement showing the number of gram sahayaks' camps held and sahayaks trained in the various States/Administrations during the nine months from October 1957 to June 1958 :

	Name of the State	No. of VLWs' Circles (Oct. 57)	Actual number of camps held during the nine months	No. of Gram Sahayaks trained during the nine months
1.	Andhra Pradesh	1850	975	46281
2.	Assam	570	348	13675
3.	Bihar	2230	1474	93107
4.	Bombay	2370	1317	55412
5.	Kerala	640	241	11894
6.	Madhya Pradesh	1950	870	36904
7.	Madras	1350	460	21925
8.	Mysore	1160	282	9507
9.	Orissa	1220	405	20533
10.	Punjab	1200	664	31270
11.	Uttar Pradesh	3420	1937	76886
12.	Delhi	50	18	802
13.	Himachal Pradesh	240	13	422
14.	N.E.F.A.	140	3	111
15.	Tripura	60	22	774
16.	Pondicherry	20	1	30
17.	Rajasthan	1020	239	10516
18.	West Bengal	1200	206	8240
	TOTAL	20,690	9,475	4,38,289

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